Affirmative Action at Work

The Case of the Canadian Auto Workers and General Motors of Canada

CAW TCA CANADA

Ontario Women's Directorate

Direction générale de la condition féminine de l'Ontario

A Change Agent Project by the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Canadian Auto Workers

90-04592/

This report was funded through the **CHANGE AGENTS PROGRAM** of the **Ontario Women's Directorate.** The program encourages employers, unions, associations and community groups to undertake and document innovative employment equity initiatives. The following report by the **Canadian Auto Workers** describes their work in negotiating a joint union management approach to implementing affirmative action.

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PREFACE

In 1984 the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) negotiated an affirmative action clause as part of its collective bargaining agreement with General Motors of Canada (GM).[1] *According to this agreement, the Company and the Union would establish joint committees to undertake affirmative action to eliminate past and present barriers to equality in employment for women, visible minorities, Native Canadians, and the disabled. There are thirty seven thousand four hundred and thirty (37,430) CAW members employed by GM in Ontario who are covered by this agreement. Such efforts are still rare in Canada and few can claim the success of this particular venture.*

For this reason, the CAW wished to document the negotiation of this clause and to describe the functioning of the committees to all interested parties. Managers, central labour bodies, individual trade unionists, as well as consultants and academics, will find this material of interest and of practical use. Funding for the research and writing of this report was provided to the CAW by the Ontario Women's Directorate.

Data collection was undertaken over an intensive two-month period. Most information was gathered through tape recorded interviews of approximately forty-five minutes to three hours in duration. Local Affirmative Action Representatives from both the Union and Management, as well as GM company spokespersons and CAW officials were interviewed. In addition, many General Motors plants throughout Ontario were toured and the files of several Local Committees were studied. All of this primary data collection was then supplemented with a review of the policy and sociological literature on affirmative action/employment equity.

Our present knowledge of equality in employment is limited in many ways. It tends to focus on the legislative framework, the social-economic costs of discrimination, and/or the "bottom line" results of (mostly American) affirmative action initiatives. However, assertions of the need for equity programmes and assessments of their results need to be supplemented with detailed studies of the actual implementation of affirmative action within a particular work setting. Though some articles offer standard guidelines for implementing programmes, they do not ground these efforts in a real workplace context.

This lack of substantive information gives rise to a further problem. Both the language and content of most analyses of affirmative action are highly objective and rationalistic. They describe affirmative action as a "human resource management tool," assess the financial and political consequences of disadvantaged and economically dependent groups for Canada's consumer economy and social welfare system, and provide highly mechanistic and systematic directives for undertaking such endeavours.

At the shopfloor level, however, affirmative action is certainly not a routine and dispassionate matter. Rather it is an emotional and personalized topic which often elicits highly charged responses. This makes it very different from other union and corporate goals and strategies. It therefore must be treated with special consideration and a sensitivity to the complexities of human behaviour.

Finally, discussions of equity programmes pay insufficient attention to the distinction between the official and unofficial, the formal and informal, head office decisions and local plant behaviour. Philosophical commitments, policy

statements, and contract language represent only one level of reality. The actual implementation of policy, commitment to change, and the interpretation of issues represent another. For instance, the Company may officially endorse affirmative action in a newsletter, but supervisors and hourly workers may not even read the message, much less seriously consider its content. Evaluations of the effectiveness of equality initiatives must consider these differences.

This report will not redress all of these problems. Such an accomplishment must be left to future, more extensive research. However, it does modestly try to identify neglected issues and work toward a fuller understanding of affirmative action. By studying the emergence, negotiation, and present day functioning of the CAW-GM programme, we can see how one union and company experienced affirmative action in a real life context.

The CAW in general, and specifically the individuals directly responsible for this initiative, try to tackle problems with pragmatism and honesty. It would therefore be wrong to present an idealized, pluralistic account of this experience. Though such a report would be safe and and inoffensive, it would also be simple-minded and of limited practical use. Every astute manager, supervisor, trade unionist, and most certainly worker, is painfully aware of the tensions, conflicts, and complexities of Canadian workplaces. Affirmative action is undertaken precisely because our workplaces are marked by privilege, power imbalances, and unequal rewards.

Moreover, because many workplace inequalities are closely linked to general societal inequalities, the Union's programme has its limits. It cannot eliminate all inequalities from the employment structures. However, it can start to reform the system. Societal injustices are neither inherent, nor so firmly entrenched that they are resistant to gradual change. The CAW-GM affirmative action committees are attempting to make changes, overcome resistance, and offer new opportunities to disadvantaged and excluded groups. Their action will produce positive, though not revolutionary outcomes for all concerned.

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November 1987

The Development of an Idea: How to translate a concept into a collective bargaining demand

The Canadian labour movement has been seriously discussing affirmative action at the policy level for many years. In both its 1982 and 1984 Collective Bargaining Documents, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) identified affirmative action as an issue which must be a priority at the bargaining table. The Union recognized that it would have to do more than lobby for legislation because effective legislation looked too distant. In addition, it wanted to prepare itself so that future laws could not arbitrarily override parts of its collective agreements. Though affirmative action contract clauses did not materialize during the 1982 round of "Big Three" negotiations (Chrysler, Ford and General Motors), the CAW did establish a paid maternity leave provision and in 1983 it negotiated a child care fund at the Canadian Fabricated Products plant in Stratford, Ontario.

Throughout the early part of the decade most provincial and national labour federations also adopted policy statements supporting equal opportunity and affirmative action. Organized labour's support of this controversial measure, however, has been more limited than its backing of other women's demands.[2] Thus by 1984, affirmative action clauses were still scarce and the issue remained largely a philosophical one. The CAW's attempts to establish a workable affirmative action programme represented a major breakthrough in labour-management relations within Canada's private sector.

How did the issue come alive within the Union? A letter written by a General Motors worker named Beverly McCloskey to then GM of Canada President, John F. Smith Jr., sparked the flow of events. In this letter, McCloskey criticized the Company for the blatantly sexist culture within its plants. The Company and Union responded by conducting some "two on two" discussions of this problem.

Bob Nickerson, National Secretary-Treasurer and Pat Clancy, National Service Representative and Area Director, represented the CAW while Rod Andrew then Director of Personnel, and Ed Hodge, then Director of Labour Relations, spoke for GM.

Following these discussions, the two parties set up a committee to further explore the situation. GM provided data on the status of its female employees in exchange for the CAW's participation and feedback. When the Union saw the Company's statistics on the gender representation within its plants, it knew some positive action was necessary. Women constituted a mere seven percent of GM of Canada's total hourly workforce. This figure had to be changed and the Union planned to make such changes through the collective bargaining process.

Clancy who had previously told GM that their affirmative action policy was inadequate, decided to seriously carry affirmative action to the bargaining table. His first task was to "sell" the idea of affirmative action to as many Union Reps as possible. He introduced the subject to the General Motors Intra-Corporation Council, a gathering of Local Union Presidents, Chairpersons and other Union Representatives within General Motors plants. In 1984 this was an exclusively male delegation.

Clancy recounts the experience, "It was a full council meeting which meant that all the delegates from all the different locals were present. This constitutes approximately sixty to sixty-five people." After the issue was raised, the Council delegates engaged in a lively discussion of women's rights, roles, and obligations, not just in the workplace, but in the home and in society as a whole. The meeting took about four and a half hours and every chauvinist remark and every logical rebuttal that has ever been expressed was repeated in that room. A few men came

out in full support of affirmative action. Some opposed it bitterly. Others supported the cause, but hesitated to speak up in the heat of the debate.

However, the forum was undoubtedly a success. By the end of the meeting, some of the men displayed a clearer understanding of affirmative action and the experiences of disadvantaged groups. Many of them eventually agreed with Clancy's argument recognizing that it was in line with the basic principles of trade unionism. Admittedly though, few men supported affirmative action from a distinctly feminist perspective.

This process of education and consciousness raising was important because once contract talks are underway an item such as affirmative action may easily be dropped without the support of the people who carry out the bargaining process and have official influence within the plants. In most unionized workplaces, disadvantaged groups can ensure that their concerns are expressed by increasing their representation on the bargaining committee or by pressuring the latter group to "fairly represent" the interests of members of the bargaining unit.[3] In the present case, however, there were few women or visible minorities in either the bargaining unit and none on the master negotiating team. There was no obvious base of support for equality issues. Pressure for action, therefore, had to come from some committed white male trade unionists. With backing from CAW leaders, Bob White, Bob Nickerson, and the GM Master Bargaining Committee, Clancy took up this task. In assessing the situation he remarks,

> We really shouldn't leave it only to the visible minorities and others to make their own argument. They can't make their argument because there are few of them who hold leadership positions and because they'll be seen as coming from a position of self-interest. It's not a position of self-interest for me to talk about visible minorities or women...

> I'm sitting in the most comfortable position in the world. I'm a white male Canadian with a good job and a lot of power. I could just conveniently sit here and be a white male Canadian with a good job and a lot of power and do nothing. But that's the problem. We've got too many people who do that.

In spite of its place on the official bargaining agenda, an affirmative action clause will fail to materialize without this kind of determination.

Negotiating an Affirmative Action Clause

On August 28, 1984, the CAW formally presented its affirmative action demands to General Motors. This document contained the Canadian Labour Congress' definition of affirmative action, a description of the various means of achieving affirmative action goals, and other specific proposals. The latter included the establishment of joint Local and Master Committees, representation of women on these Committees, sufficient access to information, targets and timetables, management accountability to a programme, consideration of the "special needs of women workers", development of an educational programme, and a fifty percent hiring quota for women. Furthermore, though this document addressed women only, it requested the right of Committees to expand their jurisdiction to include other disadvantaged groups.

The Company's response was cautious. Al Shantz, Director of Contract Administration for GM, explained their reaction. Most proposals, he says, are attempts to change the wording of some existing provision in the contract. But the affirmative action document was very different. "The Union in this case presented us with a document that outlined some totally new concepts that were not anywhere a part of the existing collective agreement." Thus just as CAW leaders had to sell the concept to other union representatives, GM officials had

to sell the idea to their negotiating team. For every hour the Company spent in talks with the Union, GM Company people from both the head office and local plants spent several hours in internal discussions.

Like the unionists, Management displayed a mixed response. While some individuals were very reactionary, others were progressive. But whatever their initial sentiments, it was imperative that local management people would eventually be comfortable with the language GM would return to the Union. This understanding, says Shantz, is secured through much internal dialogue. "In a head office position," he explains, "you can't really continually steamroll over people who are going to represent you in the plant at various occasions. You have to somehow buy into their willingness to put their heart into it and to work towards it."

Though Company representatives eventually agreed with the principle of equality in employment and recognized the need to take positive steps in this direction, they firmly objected to 1) establishing quotas and targets, and 2) selecting Local Affirmative Action Representatives from outside the existing union representation structure. Both of these concerns centered around the general issue of control.

Given the different natures and objectives of General Motors and The Canadian Auto Workers, these points of dispute were inevitable. General Motors is a corporation whose central aim is to maximize returns on its investments. In order to do this, it must maintain flexibility in the face of market fluctuations and increase efficiency by rationalizing production. The Company must therefore maintain control of labour power (the labour supply) and the labour process (how work is carried out). By agreeing to quotas and targets, however, they would be

relinquishing some of this control to the Union. According to Carol Phillips, CAW National Service Representative and Director of the Women's Department.

> Ultimately, GM wants control... The numbers the Union talks about reaching aren't unreasonable numbers, but they (GM) don't want to put a mechanism in place that says you have to hire this way, or you have to promote this way, or you have to transfer this way. They want the unfettered right to do all that. Flexibility is a real buzz word in the industry now.

Flexibility was indeed, on the minds of General Motors' spokespersons. Before committing themselves to any contract language, GM of Canada's management consulted a senior executive from the United States. Though this person did not have veto power over the Canadians, he reminded them that U.S. legislation was thrust upon the Americans, while GM of Canada was acting voluntarily. His chief concern was that GM of Canada not restrict itself by its own commitments and thereby hurt the effectiveness of running a business.

In any case, General Motors of Canada also believed that it was too early to set quotas. A numerical commitment, they claim, was out of the question because GM lacked the necessary data base on which to set concrete goals. "We don't have the physical computer operational system in place to set goals, says Margaret Pratt, Divisional Employment Equity Coordinator for General Motors of Canada. "It's far too complex to do that. You can't realistically set goals until you complete your workforce analysis." This would be a lengthy process, perhaps a year or two in duration.

GM also argued that a quota system would reduce the quality of their workforce. "We have very high selection standards in terms of education, etc." says Shantz. In reference to the skilled trades, he continued to explain that GM presently has good recognition of their apprenticeship graduates.

> We want to continue to have that high standard of graduate so that our supervision will want to give preference to apprentice graduates for skilled trades openings... You don't do that if you have to water down the entrance standards... to water down a programme just to say that you've got X percent of women will have bad results in the end in terms of the acceptance of the graduates...

Given the ultimate goals of the enterprise, this stance makes sense. However, the Union has very different objectives. The CAW's purpose is to improve the working lives of its members and to curb somewhat the Company's power over them. On the issue of control, therefore, union and management are in conflict.

The CAW argued that a programme without targets and quotas would be ineffective. Though they recognized the need for a comprehensive workforce and workplace analysis, they also believed that it was essential to discuss numbers from the start. This they countered, was possible with regard to women because GM already possessed those data in its personnel records.

Furthermore, they knew that attempts to alter current divisions of labour become more viable when there is already a sizeable constituency within the organization. Efforts to desegregate or develop equity programmes in the workplace without such a constituency may "backfire," resulting in "tokens" or "solos" who may "solidify" male workers' resistance. This, in turn, would demoralize the tokens.[4] Sooner or later, says Phillips, "GM knows it is going to have to talk numbers."

The Union also questioned the Company's argument about falling standards. Individuals who lack official credentials such as a grade twelve diploma are not necessarily incompetent, remarks Phillips. "Other factors come into play. We know that many Native Canadians, for example, would be immediately disqualified as a result of the grade twelve requirement. But they may have comparable

abilities." In addition, "a good deal of the training for work in General Motors is done on-the-job," explains Clancy. And we cannot simply assume that we will be unable to find target group workers with sufficient qualifications to perform jobs, before we even look into the communities.

Furthermore, it is the strong belief of the CAW that the Company's focus on the skilled trades is misleading. Only a small percentage of GM's workforce is employed in this area. "GM," adds Phillips, "is using the changing technology and need to ensure their workers are trainable as an excuse for maintaining the sole right to manage." This is a very appealing argument because the new technology is easily mystified. "Because many people don't really understand it," says another trade unionist, "most of us don't argue about the qualification requirements. But does the new technology really require high levels of education? In many cases it has simplified operations."

After a series of such exchanges, GM negotiators would still not commit themselves to numbers. Thus targets and quotas did not appear in the final agreement.

The other major point of dispute was the composition of the Affirmative Action Committees. The CAW proposed that where no women hold elected union positions, the CAW President shall appoint a woman to the Committee from amongst those women who are actively employed in the bargaining unit. The Company, however, did not want to expand the union representation within the plants. This, they respond, would be costly and politically undesirable. "Providing representation in the plants runs a high cost in terms of paying wages to people who are not building cars. Though it is important to have Union Reps," admits Shantz, "we don't think it's good business to keep adding and adding to union representation."

But the CAW knew that women rarely hold elected positions. The stipulation that Affirmative Action Reps come from within the existing representation would therefore automatically disqualify them. The programme however needed women, they argued. They said that women should assert their own rights and would bring personal commitment to the endeavour.

Eventually the Company saw that the Union's position made sense. Thus by the time the Committees started to function, the affirmative action document had been modified to allow for the appointment of at least one woman at each location. The Company agreed to pay new union representatives for time off the job.

General Motors' major objections to the initial CAW affirmative action document had been the targets and quotas, and expansion of union representation. Once these items were settled, they accepted the Union's general proposals. Affirmative action, however, was one of the last items settled in the 1984 negotiations. In fact even after the Master Agreement was settled, the programme was still not "signed off." Affirmative action was a "deadline item."

Possible Motives

How can we account for the CAW's success in securing this clause in its collective agreement with General Motors? At one level, the changing social and cultural climate, along with the Company's desire to present a good corporate image played a role in its open reception to the Union's proposals. Discussions of women's rights and the wrongs of gender-based discrimination in employment have contributed to a growing public awareness of inequalities, demands for change, and a proliferation of effective women's lobby groups. Stronger and louder calls for fair representation have necessitated a more serious corporate response.

General Motors was also aware of impending legislation. As a multi-national U.S. based corporation, GM understood the American experience with Equal Opportunity programmes. In the U.S., General Motors paid a $42.5 million settlement arising out of a discrimination complaint. It was furthermore forced to hire and promote more women and minorities over the following five years, and had to spend millions of dollars on training, minority education, and college scholarships for GM employees and their families.[5]

Likewise, after a Human Rights Tribunal in Canada ordered CN Rail to increase the number of women in blue collar jobs to thirteen per cent and imposed an interim hiring quota of twenty-five per cent, warnings flooded the media. Politicians, consultants, and other commentators urged firms to take corrective action while they could still do so voluntarily. Such warnings tended to focus on the consequences of American legislation.

General Motors heeded this advice. According to Shantz,

> in some cases if we thought that certain things were coming anyway through legislation, it would be far better to design something that made sense to us internally than to have some legislative forum imposed on us.

Though the Company was not directly "driven" in this case by the threat of mandatory legislation, it certainly "made sense to go this route" when the CAW made its proposals.[6]

Ultimately, however, the real push for action came from the CAW. It expressed a strong commitment to equality issues and had the power to translate this commitment into concrete results. During the 1984 negotiations, some Union leaders were determined to get an affirmative action clause. In turn, the

Company re ›ected that they had to give them something in order to put a contract together. At this point GM felt secure that they would not be relinquishing to the Union, their ultimate control in hiring. Given this, their compliance made sense.

Affirmative Action Language: Goals, Structure, and Guidelines

This basic agreement between the Union and the Company showed that both parties recognized problems within GM's employment structure. This awareness represented the first important step toward fair representation. The next step was to establish a more specific course of action.

The specifics of the affirmative action document (document 107), were issued in September of 1985, nearly a year after the Contract had been settled. The 1985 document described the basic structure and mechanics of the programme: the selection and composition of Master and Local Committees, time off for Affirmative Action Representatives, accountability, responsibilities, goals, and guidelines for action.

Joint Union-Management Committees:

From the start, the Union wanted to clearly establish in writing, the fully joint nature of the committees. A joint committee is not one in which management has final decision-making power, they asserted. Every member of the Committee had to know that all decisions were to be made on the basis of the full input of representatives of each party. It was important that this be stated because critics of joint initiatives often claim that management overrides labour's decisions. Opponents also warn that these committees become bound in unnecessarily lengthy discussions and bureaucratic delays, with an absence of concrete results.

Both the CAW and GM were aware of these possibilities but they knew that the benefits of this approach far outweighed any risks. The Company welcomed the idea of joint affirmative action committees because it complemented their new managerial strategy. GM is moving away from the traditional, adversarial style of labour-management relations, toward a joint, problem solving approach says Shantz.

> it struck a chord in us in that a lot of things that have been a part of collective bargaining over the years that we think is really improper, has been adversarial... The Union's approach on affirmative action was interesting in that it suggested a joint leadership kind of approach.

In recent years the Company and Union have established a number of reasonably successful joint programmes. Union Apprentice Coordinators, for example, work with management on a joint apprenticeship programme. Health and Safety Reps and Employee Counsellors operate on a cooperative basis also. GM, furthermore, was one of the first companies to have a major joint substance abuse programme.

In addition, union-management cooperation was necessary because each party possessed exclusive resources. According to Clancy, the CAW could have set up an affirmative action programme whenever it wanted, but a union only programme would not obligate the Company to do anything. A joint programme has built-in obligations. The Company must, for instance, relate its commitment throughout the organization. In the most ideal circumstances the Union could secure the commitment of hourly workers, but it could not garner the support of supervisors and plant mangers. This support, however, is essential because local managements largely contribute to workplace culture and control many rewards. Top management could use its power and authority to secure their cooperation.

Under a joint system, furthermore, Union Reps may have access to the firm's financial resources. In the present case, GM picks up most of the financial costs. This is important because affirmative action can be an expensive undertaking. GM pays Affirmative Action Reps for their time off from production work and provides Reps with an in-plant office, desk, and telephone. Furthermore, during training sessions, the Union provides instruction while the Company pays most of the accommodation and per diem costs.

The CAW also recognized that the plants belong to General Motors and although the Union attempts to assert some control, management retains many exclusive rights. Hiring, for example, is within Management's sole jurisdiction. And equality in employment depends heavily upon changes in hiring practices. The CAW therefore saw the need to work with the Company to ensure that such changes are made.

In turn, the Company would benefit from the Union's participation. With the exception of hiring, many institutional barriers to workplace equality are codified in collective bargaining agreements. Attempts to alter the organization's employment system, therefore, could violate sections of the agreement. Job bidding rules, apprenticeship programmes, and seniority systems, for example, may all be affected by affirmative action.

Furthermore, the Union could ease the process of attitudinal change and secure cooperation at the shopfloor level. To hourly workers, the CAW has more legitimacy than does GM management. Many workers within the firm strongly distrust GM managers and would refuse to voluntarily participate in any endeavour which was not supported by local union leaders. Affirmative action in itself is a highly contentious undertaking. Without official union backing, workers would be even more skeptical of it.

In addition, experienced trade unionists have a clear understanding of how the plants function at the informal, as well as formal level. Through years of experience in contract negotiations, disputes settlements, and production and trades work, these individuals have become highly astute in regard to GM operations. They know the work setting, and they know the workforce, and such knowledge is essential in the application of change. In these ways, joint committees permit the Company and the Union to pool resources and talents. "It is an instance," says Shantz, "where the Company and Union can accomplish more together, than either party could do separately."

Opponents of the joint approach to affirmative action sometimes advocate the alternative of clause by clause negotiations. The CAW and General Motors, however, purposely avoided this strategy. In 1984, the GM Collective Agreement did contain equality clauses. For instance, a paragraph in the Contract stipulates that all provisions "be applied to all employees covered by the Agreement without regard to race, colour, creed, age, sex, or national origin." Also, Document 1, entitled "Non-Discrimination in Employment," extends all opportunities to all qualified applicants and employees on a nondiscriminatory basis." These statements are admirable, but they do not accomplish much in terms of results.

Furthermore, we have seen that the Company would not make numerical commitments. At this point, says Clancy, "it's pretty hard to get a clause that says X number of women will be hired in the next three years." Moreover the alteration of other provisions would be premature. Both the Union and Company need to systematically review employment systems and the concentration of workers before they can start to change contract provisions in a responsible way.

Frankly, says Phillips, "we don't have all the answers at this point. We don't really know sometimes what's going to end up happening and what the result is going to be. As long as we keep on trying is the main thing." Company spokespersons express similar sentiments. "GM," says Pratt, "sees affirmative action as a process that unfolds. We may need to move in certain directions that were not prescribed." "It's not a blueprint... it should be open," adds Claude Denoncourt, Director of Labour Relations for GM. After the Joint Committees isolate key problems, items would have to be negotiated on a clause by clause basis. But the first task of the Reps would be to identify these problems.

The CAW and GM furthermore believed that if equity issues were settled at the bargaining table, the parties might end up fighting for the content of their agenda, thus making the process a political exercise. In an adversarial situation there may be a greater focus on winning short term gains at the expense of long term needs. And "we're not interested in making commitments to get rid of the issue per se on a short term basis," says Denoncourt. The issue with joint committees is the achievement of the goal of equality in employment as opposed to what one side can immediately gain from the other. "In the long run," he adds, "the joint approach is more fruitful because it produces better dialogue, provides for more input, and better planning."

Master and Local Committees:

The Affirmative Action Agreement also specifies that there be one Master Committee, and a Local Committee within each GM plant throughout Ontario and Quebec. The Master Committee consists of two representatives of the CAW National Office and two representatives of General Motors' Divisional Management. Presently, Pat Clancy and Carol Phillips represent the Union, and Margaret Pratt and Claude Denoncourt represent the Company.

Local Committees have been established in Oshawa, Woodstock, Windsor, Scarborough, Toronto, and London in Ontario, and in St. Therese in Quebec. Each of these Committees is composed of two Union Representatives. One must come from the existing representation structure and one (woman) must be actively employed in the bargaining unit. Both of these Reps are appointed by the President of the CAW. Furthermore, each Affirmative Action Representative is permitted to leave his/her regular work for twelve hours per week in order to perform affirmative action duties. If the Representative already receives time off for other purposes, s/he will be given additional time to carry out these responsibilities.

The exceptions to these provisions are Oshawa and Woodstock. Because of the large size of the Oshawa plant, two women have been appointed. And because of the small size of Woodstock, Representatives in this location receive only six hours per week of affirmative action time.

In addition, a comparable number of Management Representatives have been appointed in each location. In many cases, the Personnel Director has selected these individuals on the basis of fairly subjective criteria. Like the union appointees, some management people were chosen because of their personal beliefs. Others were appointed because of their official position within the firm. Many Reps, for example, come from a personnel function. This enables them to bring into their role an understanding of GM's human resource policy as well as ready access to personnel data.[7]

The CAW and GM both believed that the programme must be carried out by people who work in the plants. They strongly opposed the recruitment of an employment equity consultant. This, they claimed, would only increase skepticism of the programme. In addition, an external advisor would eventually leave the site and someone within the plant would have to be trained to oversee the

programme throughout the years. Local Representatives, they believed, would also best understand the practical operation of their plants and the attitudes and concerns of the workers.

In addition, local people often react adversely to head office decisions. For instance, both supervisors and workers may claim that head office directives are insensitive to their interests because top level decision-makers are exempt from the effects of such programmes. Local Reps, however, work (often side by side) with other employees in the plant. Also, the Union knew that Representatives would show initiative and enthusiasm only if they had ownership of the programme.

This reasoning also led the Union and Company to insist on the autonomy of local committees. The Master Committee coordinates local initiatives, resolves disputes, conducts training, and provides general direction, while Local Committees choose and undertake specific activities based on their own assessments of local needs. Though Local Affirmative Action Committees are not accountable to the Master Committee in a structured sense, they meet regularly to report on their work. During these meetings Local Committees may be questioned and forced to justify their activities. Says Phillips, "this in itself acts as a constant refresher on what the affirmative action programme is about."

Goals and Guidelines:

In order to ensure some consistency, the CAW and GM also issued general guidelines for the Local Committees. The Affirmative Action Document advises Reps to focus on recruitment, training for current employees, and communicating

the message of workplace equality. These guidelines reveal the comprehensive nature of the CAW-GM initiative. It affects potential workers, current workers, the workplace, and society-wide institutions such as education.

Furthermore, the 1985 Document was expanded to address visible minorities, Native Canadians, and people with disabilities, in addition to women. However, because of the easy identification of women and the relative strength of interest groups, their first priority is the eradication of gender-based inequalities.

Training

Individuals entered their roles as Affirmative Action Reps with varying degrees of knowledge and experience. Furthermore, as noted, their guidelines for action were general. Thus soon after the programme was established the Master Committee organized a four-day training course which would accomplish three central objectives: 1) familiarize the Reps with the basic concepts and principles of affirmative action, 2) teach union and management participants to work together in a non-adversarial context, and 3) prepare the Local Committees to confront real workplace situations.

Carol Phillips, who conducted the training sessions, divided the Reps into individual groups - each composed of management and union people from the same location. At one session, the groups were forced to deal with a potential workplace encounter. Phillips asked the Reps to identify the most formidable barriers to affirmative action within their particular workplaces. They then had to propose working solutions to these problems. This strategy, says Phillips, forced the Union and Management Reps to solve problems as a unit. In the process, they learned to drop their adversarial rules, and become acquainted as individuals with a common goal.

Not only did Reps from the same plants learn to work with one another, but the Committee as a whole was able to compare problems and solutions from a variety of locations. This interaction, furthermore, has become an established part of the programme. The entire Affirmative action Committee meets quarterly for two days. During these meetings the focus again is on communication. Reps share and update information. In this sense, training is an ongoing activity.

Local Committees at Work: Experiencing Affirmative Action on the Shopfloor

The Master Committee believed that the training session was imperative because of the importance of individual reps to the overall success of the programme. "It doesn't matter what you put on paper, what you put in an agreement... We put something in an agreement and because people won't make the effort to put the thing together it just sits there... If you put the effort in, it's going to work," explains Clancy. Ultimately, rank and file workers themselves must make these efforts. After all, they possess the necessary practical knowledge and influence.

Though no two Committees set forth the same agenda, they generally focussed on four types of activity:

1) analysis of the work setting,

2) education and communications,

3) training for current employees, and

4) recruitment within the community.

In addition, all Affirmative Action Committees carried out a plant wide census. The Census was initiated and directed largely by the Master Committee. All other activities were specific to the local plants and done voluntarily.

Getting to Know the Workplace:

Simply by working in the plants and living in the communities, most Reps had acquired a basic understanding of their work contexts. But as a whole they needed to better familiarize themselves with the concerns of the workforce and the nature of their local employment systems from the perspective of affirmative action practitioners.

Each Committee adopted a different strategy. The St. Catharines Committee met with a spokesperson from the Native Friendship Centre in Fort Erie and gathered figures on the distribution of the Native population in regional Niagara. The London Committee conducted an unofficial visual survey to identify the racial composition of their workforce. This was feasible because GM's London plant employs fewer than 1,000 hourly workers. This Committee also gathered literature on the racial composition of the London area, and the availability of training programmes for women. Similarly, at the Scarborough Van plant in Toronto, they conducted an informal census of their hourly workforce. The Committee estimated the percentage of women and visible minorities both within the plant as a whole, and within various job classifications.

In the Windsor Transmission plant, the Reps consulted census materials, officials at the Windsor City Hall, the CAW, GM, and various organizations in Toronto and Ottawa, in an effort to obtain data on the four target groups. They then compared much of this data with their own workforce composition. In addition, they joined other committees in distributing questionnaires to assess the needs and concerns of their local workforces. Like the Reps in Woodstock and Windsor Trim, they issued child care needs surveys. The Woodstock and Windsor Trim plants employ many women who have trouble securing good quality, affordable child care which takes account of their rotating shift work.

The most important task of the Local Committees was to acquire or strengthen their knowledge of their plant and community. Not everyone gathered this information in a systematic way. Some Committees mistakenly embarked upon time consuming activities first, and then realized the need to better acquaint themselves with the needs of the plant workforce. Others collected data while they undertook other tasks. Clearly, their learning is ongoing.

Communicating the Message:

Given a knowledge of the basic workings of the plant, one would assume that communicating information on affirmative action would be an easy task. This, however, proved wrong. Everyone found that few workers and managers accurately understood the meaning of affirmative action and the nature of systemic discrimination. They were also unaware of the purpose of the Affirmative Action Committees. How could the Committees educate all these people, especially when many of the Reps themselves had just become familiar with the concepts?

The Committee in Oshawa faced perhaps the most formidable problems. It had to deal with considerable structural barriers to effective communication: enormous size and a high level of bureaucratization. GM's Oshawa plant is big. Spanning several city blocks, and employing approximately 17,000 hourly workers, it represents the largest motor vehicle manufacturing operation in North America. Annie Labaj, Affirmative Action Rep for Oshawa, recalls her first experience in the plant. "Initially, when I walked in I was awed by the size of the plant... The foreman told me to remember my column number because that's about the only way you're going to remember where you're working. They run letters across the plant widthwise and they run numbers lengthwise. So that's one way you find where your work station is so you don't get lost." Labaj also explains that the Oshawa

structure is really composed of five different plants. The truck plant, battery plant, two assembly plants, and fabrication all make up General Motors in Oshawa.

The logistics of communication alone posed problems. Reps Labaj and Mary Anne Green engaged in many one on one interactions with workers. Simply in walking from one end of the plant to the other, they would meet a couple of people who would ask them questions about their work. This type of communication produced positive results in all locations. But in Oshawa it reached only a handful of people. With this method alone, it would take a number of years to reach each of Oshawa's 17,000 workers. Furthermore, because most employees work rotating shifts, the Reps would never come face to face with everyone. This simply was not an effective communication strategy.

The Committee tried to overcome the size factor by communicating their ideas through formal and centralized means. For example, they set up information seminars at the local union hall and printed short articles on affirmative action in Company publications. Though they knew that this would not reach everyone, each employee at least had access to these sources. The problem of shift work, furthermore, was addressed by holding two separate information sessions. They also held the seminars directly after a union meeting, at which the Union Shop Committee would likely attend.

These approaches, however, depended upon the voluntary participation of workers. If people genuinely wanted to learn about affirmative action, they would have attended the seminars and read published communications. But because they were disinterested, they easily avoided the meetings and overlooked the articles.

Union Committeepersons and Chairpersons admit that workers seldom read Company publications and when they do read them it is because the production line is down and they have nothing else to do. Even during these times, they read selectively. For example, says a Local Rep from another GM plant, "when they see the words 'affirmative action' or 'women's rights', some guys will just bypass the article." And this behaviour is not specific to workers. Management Reps also report that when their colleagues receive memos headed with the words "affirmative action" or "employment equity", "they may or may not bother to look at them." Unfortunately, these words have a stigma attached to them. Some people are not interested in them. Often this disinterest turns into active avoidance.

Traditional worker distrust of management posed a further problem. Employment equity consultants correctly advise that top level management must show full support of equity programmes, but they should add that managerial commitment is rarely sufficient to secure the support of unionized workers. Many workers were suspicious, perhaps even hostile toward management. Some even distrusted the Union Reps who worked jointly with Company people.

Where this atmosphere of distrust was combined with the large plant size and an excess of information, workers tended to rely on a few key individuals (or leaders) as receptors of information. Because they trust these individuals to interpret issues and to filter necessary knowledge, they do not seek facts independently. Despite the many means and formal channels of communication, people ultimately resort to informal and familiar sources.

With this in mind, Affirmative Action Reps must ensure that the source of their information is perceived as credible. "We need to identify group leaders," says Monty Fielding, an Affirmative Action Rep and Union Committeeperson in London. In GM's London plant there are many "ethnic cliques", each with an unofficial leader. Similar groupings have developed in the Windsor Trim plant, with its many workers of European descent. Where there is a strong group leader, the Reps should focus their efforts on first educating him/her. This would be far more effective in the long run, than acting without the support of those people whose opinions are trusted. The advantage of drawing one Affirmative Action Rep from the elected union representation is that this person already has some influence within the plant. Furthermore, Local Affirmative Action Committees which had the strong endorsement of their Shop committees found their education work relatively smooth.

The workforce composition of GM's Oshawa plant further explains some of its education problems. Approximately ninety-five percent of the plant's hourly workforce is male. And most of these men are white. This numerical dominance has led to a dominant masculine plant culture. It is a culture of pin-ups, sexist jokes, and male peer pressure. The plant is also the oldest and largest automotive facility in Canada. All of these factors have contributed to a strongly ritualistic, tradition-bound, homogeneous culture which is difficult to penetrate. Because of the force of this culture, Reps found it easier to isolate individuals and reason with them on a personal basis. As individuals, most workers could understand the need for positive change. As a group, they resisted change because it threatened their traditions and culture.[8]

In many ways GM's Woodstock plant is the diametrical opposite of Oshawa. The Woodstock plant is a more recently established warehouse which employs approximately five hundred workers, thirty-five percent of whom are female. Most people see this plant as "tame" in comparison to Oshawa. It had its share of "girlie" pictures and sexist horseplay, but it is a less explicitly masculine environment. Because of its larger share of female workers, Woodstock is indeed more "woman-friendly."[9] Men have become accustomed to the female presence here. The local union in Woodstock even voluntarily established its own (eleven person) affirmative action committee. One female line worker from another large, male-dominated GM plant claims that Woodstock is the perfect place for her after retirement.

These features, however, have not ensured a sexually egalitarian work context. Though male workers accept the employment of many women, the plant culture is still male dominated. Even in Woodstock, men define the value system. Thus, affirmative action was sometimes mocked and trivialized. Because of its stigma, some men and women refused to speak out in support of the issue. For this reason, Sandi Ross, former Affirmative Action Rep for the plant and CAW instructor, says it is easier to slip affirmative action into a course or discussion of other issues, rather than to single out the issue and address it directly.

In this sense, Woodstock houses the same values and prejudices as does Oshawa, but in Woodstock these ideas are less intense and more easily countered. This is because the structural barriers to communication were less of a problem in the warehouse. Because of the plant's small size, Affirmative Action Reps had the option of initiating private conversations with workers.

LOCAL COMMITTEE INITIATIVES

Training and Upgrading The Existing Workforce:

In addition to general education work, some Local Committees have focussed on training and upgrading for women who are currently employed by General Motors. Recent statistics reveal the importance of this type of work. Although women presently constitute approximately ten per cent of GM's hourly workforce, they represent fewer than one per cent of workers in the skilled trades classifications. Of course, this focus was possible only where there were sufficient numbers of interested women. The London plant, for example, employs only twenty women, and contains relatively few job classifications. According to Monty Fielding, there was not much point in setting up training programmes because of these factors. Similarly, the Woodstock committee decided to pursue other activities because their plant does not have an apprenticeship programme which women could eventually enter.

The Oshawa, Scarborough, and St.Catharines plants, all have thriving apprenticeship programmes and many skilled trades positions. These large plants are also more vertical than the others. Therefore women who tend to be clustered in entry level, less rewarding jobs, could in the future move up to higher job grades. The Oshawa, Scarborough, and St. Catharines Committees also knew that GM would not be hiring many new workers in the future. For this reason, training the current workforce seemed a logical endeavour.

In Oshawa, Durham College asked the Affirmative Action Reps to participate in a provincially funded skills development project for women. In conjunction with the College, the Oshawa Committee thus set up a pre-apprenticeship training programme for its women workers. Annie Labaj explains, "we call it an apprenticeship awareness programme so it wouldn't be

confused with the existing apprenticeship programme in Oshawa." This course does not immediately grant women a place in the apprenticeship programme. Rather, it upgrades them in the skills they will eventually need when they apply for an apprenticeship. Because all the students are female, it also addresses their particular needs and offers emotional support, as well as purely academic training. In addition, this course accounts for the women's rotating shift work and provides (free of charge) child care. Labaj and the others were pleased when close to one hundred women within GM responded to their advertisement of the programme. Though there presently is room for only thirty students, they hope to soon expand the project.

A similar programme is underway in the Scarborough Van Plant. In Scarborough, however, the pre-apprentice training courses are not exclusive to women. "Anyone who wants to upgrade their skills can participate in this course," says Darlene Christie, Affirmative Action Rep. Christie reports sitting in her newly attained affirmative action office not quite knowing where to begin. Knowing that one of the programmes' emphasis was training, she picked up a telephone book and phoned almost every educational institution that was listed.

In the process, she learned that not one institution offered a programme for shift workers. This posed a problem because almost all of GM's hourly employees work rotating two week shifts. How could women ever upgrade their skills if the training was not available? By chance, she contacted the Scarborough Centre for Alternative Studies. They liked the idea of pre-apprenticeship training for shift workers and consequently got a programme underway. To date, approximately sixty workers have signed up from the day shift alone. Christie herself enrolled in some courses and finds that despite the hard work, it is a step in the right direction.

The Affirmative Action Committee in St.Catharines also noted the absence of women in highly paid and prestigious skilled trades. Their strategy, however, was to give women better access to information on this type of work. Consequently, they organized apprenticeship information seminars, with a special appeal to the female worker. In recounting the evolution of this project, the St.Catharines Reps say that, like Christie, they had their affirmative action mandate and guidelines, but did not know where to go exactly. They decided to focus on apprenticeship information because a former Rep had extensive knowledge of the apprenticeship system and because it seemed like a non-threatening endeavour.

The Committee set up the seminars in their local union hall. Representatives of the skilled trades were on hand to offer advice, women who perform non-traditional skilled work related their work experiences, and the Reps showed a film on pre-trades and technological training for women. Following this, a representative from the St.Catharines Apprenticeship Committee informed participants of the selection procedures and requirements of the programme, and the vice-principal of a nearby high school described the courses which have been set up for GM employees. Approximately 120 people attended this seminar and two-thirds of these were women. They report the experience as very positive.

Recruitment:

The Affirmative Action Committee in St. Catharines also focussed on recruiting young women from the community into non-traditional employment. Though General Motors may not hire, they believed that other companies would.

They reasoned that young girls in grades seven and eight should be told that they can enter non-traditional work. They also must be shown that some women are already employed in these areas. They thus put together a presentation to take to community schools.

This presentation was delivered by all members of the Committee. Students, they believe, respond best to a personal approach as opposed to a formal lecture. Each Rep stands before the classes and recounts his or her own employment experiences. "It's at this time," says Rob Dirisio, local representative, "that they sit up and take interest."

Phyllis Smith and Monty Fielding, Reps in the London Plant, also chose to work with the community. Smith and Fielding's efforts represent an impressive amount of dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm. They put together a slide presentation of workers in various jobs throughout the plant: welders, electrical assemblers, machinists, painters, and skilled tradespeople, in an effort to show grades seven and eight students that there are diverse job opportunities in the labour market. It was important that they communicate this message before the students commit themselves to certain job paths.

Though outreach programmes often involved bureaucratic delays, Smith and Fielding have made rapid progress. "We wanted the blessing of the school boards, but when we didn't get it we went in any way. Now, we've got their blessing," reports Fielding. Indeed, the schools are presently calling the Reps and requesting their presentation. Thus far, they have covered approximately eighty per cent of all grades seven and eight classes in London and the surrounding area. The students are enthusiastic and inquisitive, and it is a rewarding venture for all concerned.

The Census:

In addition to the local activities, the CAW-GM Affirmative Action Committees launched a company wide census of GM's 45,000 employees on June 18, 1987. This workforce audit would permit the Committees to see exactly how many women, visible minorities, Native Canadians, and the disabled were employed within each plant. Everyone knew that their representation was low, but this knowledge was based only on casual observations, and precise statistics are needed to take more concrete action toward change.

Preparation for Census Day was indeed extensive. The Master Committee, with the help of Local Reps, drew up many drafts of a questionnaire to elicit data on each employee's sex and race. Employees were also asked whether they were of Native Canadian ancestry, had a physical disability, and if they would take advantage of an English as a second language course. Space for additional comments was also provided. The Committee made sure the language was clear and the questions were short. They then consulted an official from the Human Rights Commission to ensure that no questions violated anyone's rights. Ultimately, the questionnaire required minimal effort on the part of respondents.

The Committee also conducted a systematic and comprehensive campaign to promote the Census. From April 22 to June 18, many memos, letters, posters, bulletins, and the like were distributed from the Union and the Company head offices to Local Union Shop Committees, supervisors, managers, and employees within each plant. On June 18, the Committees even issued reminders in each employee's paycheque. Furthermore, Bob White, President of the CAW, and George Peapples, President of GM of Canada jointly issued a formal announcement of the Census. And most Local Reps publicized the event in local Union newspapers and

Company media. These communications explained the purpose and importance of the Census, the procedure by which census forms would be distributed, and stressed the strict confidentiality of the forms.

On June 18, most workers knew about the Affirmative Action Committees and the workforce audit. Local Reps even wore "Count Me In," Census Day T-shirts so that they could be readily spotted by anyone who sought further information. Supervisors were responsible for distributing a census form to each employee, while workers returned completed forms either to an Affirmative Action Rep or to a drop box. These forms were then distributed to EDS, the firm which tabulated the census results.

Was the Census a success? It proved highly valuable in raising the profile of the Affirmative Action Committees and their work. It also forced the Reps to get out on the shopfloor and discuss equality issues with their co-workers. The conversations gave the Reps a clear sense of workers' and managers' understanding of the concept and concerns about the affirmative action process.

A small group of workers came out in full support of affirmative action. Others, however, expressed concerns about the possibility of "reverse discrimination." These respondents generally claimed that women and racial minorities are taking all the "good jobs" in Canada because of preferential treatment. Comments also indicate that many people misunderstand the nature of "systemic discrimination." They tend to believe that equal opportunity in employment is sufficient to ensure equal outcomes and rely heavily upon concepts of merit and individual achievement. Their central concern in this area was that the firm would disregard formal qualifications and relevant hiring criteria in order to employ women, visible minorities, and the disabled. Other respondents

expressed strong reservations about providing the company with personal information on matters such as a physical disability.

But in spite of these comments, the Affirmative Action Reps plan to continue enthusiastically with their work. They know that only a small, though important and vocal, minority made negative statements. And they recognize that far more people did not oppose or question their work. Furthermore, efforts to secure equality require that these ideas be raised and debated. "If everyone wholeheartedly supported equality issues from the start, why would we be doing all of this?" asks one Local Rep. A far worse problem, and perhaps the biggest and most common mistake is to ignore or downplay the resistance which exists in the workplace. This leaves opposing ideas unchallenged, resistance intact, and affirmative action practitioners unprepared for the challenges they must eventually meet.

In terms of response rates, the success of the Census is less obvious because results differed considerably from plant to plant. These differences largely reveal the impact of the variables discussed above. For example, in Oshawa with its large size, decentralized structure, and predominantly white male workforce, the response rate was a low forty-three per cent. However in London, a much smaller plant which is composed primarily of white men, the rate was close to seventy per cent. And in the Toronto Truck Centre which employs eighty-seven males, many of whom are minorities, an impressive ninety-eight per cent of the workforce responded to the Census. These figures are encouraging because they suggest that the greatest problems lie in the communication and education areas as opposed to unalterable beliefs within the plants. Indeed on the basis of this knowledge, the Affirmative Action Committees plan to make education their future focus. The Reps will compose a list of the most common myths and concern about affirmative action and will directly address them within the plants.

Conclusion:

Inequality is a basic feature of Canadian society. Canadian society is dominated by a white male power structure. Given this context, how can one organization begin to achieve equality? The Canadian Auto Workers decided that it would be feasible to secure the fair representation of various groups within one of its largest unionized firms, General Motors of Canada.[10] Though this would leave many basic inequalities intact, it would be a step toward greater justice. Bad jobs may still exist, but at least certain groups should not disproportionately fill these jobs. Furthermore, work organizations are the most logical site for change. One's paycheque, afterall, defines one's economic position. And insofar as we spend much of our lives at work, our employment experiences influence our general perceptions and attitudes.

In this report we have attempted to describe the history of the CAW's initiative. We have traced the development of the concept of Affirmative Action within the Union, the negotiation of an Affirmative Action clause with General Motors of Canada, the establishment of a concrete programme, and the day to day functioning of joint union-management committees. In each section we have also examined the reasoning behind key decisions, disagreements between the Union and Company, and the general problems and successes of the programme.

The current literature on Affirmative Action/Employment Equity addresses two major questions: Why should a firm undertake Affirmative Action? and What are the results of Affirmative Action endeavours? This report asks another important question: How does one establish and implement Affirmative Action in a unionized workplace. In relating the CAW experience, we have hopefully provided one answer.

The CAW believed strongly in contributing some substantive information to our current understanding of Affirmative Action. Policy statements and top

level philosophical commitments are admirable and important as symbolic gestures, but knowledge must be brought down to the level of social practice. This is because there is often a wide gap between practice and philosophy. We need to consider how people implement, and live with these changes in a real life context because the power to truly make things work rests in their hands.

Towards A Broader Framework

As this report was being completed, the CAW and General Motors settled their 1987 Collective Agreement. Document 107 on Affirmative Action underwent some minor changes in language. Whereas previously the President of the CAW would temporarily appoint a woman to the Affirmative Action Committees until one was elected to an existing Union postion, the 1987 amendment states that one member of each committee will be designated from the existing representation structure and the other member will be designated from among the women who are actively employed in the bargaining unit.

In addition, the new contract stipulates that Local Affirmative Action Representatives may be authorized extra time to fulfill their responsibilities. Both parties, however, must agree upon any changes.

More outstanding, however, are the offshoots of the Affirmative Action programme. For example, the CAW negotiated a literacy training programme, the appointment of mixed sex teams within each plant to deal with general workplace harassment, and establishment of a child care fund. The Union and Company will also set up three hours of human rights training for every General Motors employee. This is something the two parties have been discussing for a long time, and both see its formal negotiation as a remarkable breakthrough. It will be a massive undertaking, covering approximately 45,000 employees, and

costing GM an estimated five million dollars. According to the CAW and GM, "Human Rights training is a fundamental step in the parties' joint activities related to Affirmative Action and will help to complement future proactive initiatives of the Company and the Union in their mutual objective of achieving a fair and representative workforce."

In addition to these provisions, the Union and Company agreed to make all their contract language gender-neutral. This is a symbolic gesture, but one with real life consequences. It is important because it reflects the changing environment. Gender neutral language acknowledges that women are presently employed and will continue to work in the Company. Furthermore, both Union and Company Representatives deal with contract language on a regular basis. When they read the gender neutral version they may gradually drop male biases and think in less exclusive terms. Though the use of gender neutral language will not necessarily abolish sexism in other areas, it will help to foster new patterns of thinking.[11]

In recognition of the CAW and GM's joint efforts to achieve equality in employment, the Ontario Women's Directorate presented both parties with an Employment Equity Award for 1987. Along with three other enterprises, the Canadian Auto Workers and General Motors were awarded for recognizing the need to ensure equitable and fair treatment for all of their employees.[12]

The next few years will be busy and important ones. The Local Committees have planned many individual activities. The St. Catharines group, for instance, is presently working on a brochure which school children can take home to show their parents. Since parents are highly influential in their children's job choices, they thought it would be useful to inform them of non-traditional

opportunities for their off-spring. Likewise, the London Committee hopes to organize an education seminar for young students at the local union hall. They would set up an "open house" where people could learn about various job prospects and their educational requirements.

On a company-wide level, the next major task is the Census follow-up. Each Local Committee has assessed its problems and will soon attempt to increase response rates on the basis of this knowledge. After this, the Union and Company must embark on a job group and workplace analysis. These too would be done internally at the local level. But before Reps can proceed, they will need more training.

Admittedly, the workplace analysis will likely be highly complex and more controversial an effort than present activities. Thus far, the Committees have been concentrating on the current and potential workforce. In the future, they will have to examine and eliminate barriers within the employment practices themselves. Strengthening workers rights to training, redefining job qualifications and challenging accepted values may all prove somewhat threatening to the Company.

Further into the future the Committees must also take a closer look at visible minorities, Native Canadians, and the disabled. Currently the CAW and GM are focussing on gender-based inequalities because women are readily identified and the strongest interest group of the four within the Union and plants. In addition, because we have more extensive data on women's employment situation, we better understand their problems. Insofar as it is preferable to study one group properly, than to present weak analyses of all four, this is justifiable. However, at the same time we want to avoid the self-justifying argument that because they suffer from such complex and distinct problems, other groups must

be addressed separately and at a later date. This bears too much resemblance to the old line which male researchers long used to justify their neglect of women. It cannot be uttered with ease, and without a tinge of hypocrisy.

The CAW also sees a future need to properly address the other target groups because of startling U.S. reports that Affirmative Action has benefitted women, but white women only. In some cases, firms implemented mandatory programmes with the result of widening opportunities and job movement for white women and increasing the ghettoization of black women.[13] Thus just as we cannot rely upon all non-white men to address the needs of women, we cannot assume that all white women are going to recognize the distinct needs of minority women. The need to examine the situation of minorities is especially pressing in light of the increasing activism by the latter group.

Presently then, we face a dilemma. Our solution is to recognize that while we lack the resources to equally address all the target groups, we may currently study the interrelatedness of the different forms of discrimination. While the problems of each group are very unique, the same organizational mechanisms keep them in place. Therefore an evaluation of these mechanisms is in order.

Another long term CAW goal is legislative change. "Political activity," states the CAW 1987 Collective Bargaining Report, "is fundamental to union activity because . . . It influences our relative ability to make progress by setting laws and standards and influencing the economic environment in which we act. And it is an instrument through which we can achieve goals not achievable at the bargaining table."

CAW stresses the need for Affirmative Action legislation because of the lack of voluntary efforts in this area. And given the current economic climate and the increased rationalization of production, purely voluntary programmes may be even more scarce in the future.

In addition, in spite of the broader economic context, smaller, less powerful unions and non-unionized workers will not benefit from such programmes. Unions which are less powerful than the CAW would have a difficult time prioritizing Affirmative Action as a bargaining issue, says Phillips. "They're still fighting for more bread and butter gains likes wages, cost of living allowances, pensions, etc. So they can only carry one fight at a time"... Non-unionized workers would fare even worse.

But with legislation, the small companies will "perk up as they did with Pay Equity legislation. And they'll say to themselves we've got to talk about it because it's legislation." Moreover when unions bargain an issue, more pressure is put on the Government to provide legislation so that all workers are covered. This pressure comes from the workers themselves, and the corporations who have negotiated these issues in their collective agreements. Companies who face these demands at the bargaining table, says Phillips, will press for legislation because without it, they are at a competitive disadvantage to other firms. In these ways, "instead of creating an elite group of workers in the trade union movement, you influence social planning" (for all).

Developments within the next few years will be crucial. Because the Committees are still new, they will face extreme scrutiny. Representatives will have to learn by their own mistakes and continually develop improved strategies.

But these years are also crucial because the programme is not yet firmly rooted within the Union and Company structures. We saw that the development of this programme depended largely upon the determination and efforts of a few key individuals. In upcoming years, both parties must work hard to entrench Affirmative Action so that it cannot be dropped or traded away when these people leave the organization. We have a feeling, however, on the basis of current trends, that this struggle for fair representation will soon develop a life of its own - one that will defy indifference and opposition.

NOTES

[1]After contract talks in 1984, the United Auto Workers in Canada officially broke away from the International Union and established itself as the Canadian Auto Workers. Throughout this report, the Union is referred to as the CAW.

[2]Aach, Hanna, "Unions and Affirmative Action," Unpublished Paper Prepared for the Canadian Labour Congress (March 1983), p.4.

[3]A bargaining committee is the group of elected union representatives who negotiate a collective agreement. A bargaining unit is the collection of union members who are represented by a union local.

[4]Bielby, William T. and James N. Baron, "A Women's Place Is With Other Women: Sex Segregation Within Organizations," in Sex Segregation in the Workplace, ed. Barbara F. Reskin (Washington, D.C.: National Academy, 1984) p.53.

[5]Ontario Federation of Labour, "Statement on Women and Affirmative Action" (November 1982), p.41.

[6]Presently, GM's London and Oshawa plants have contracts with the federal government. They are therefore subject to contract compliance laws. This means that they must implement an employment equity programme. Contract compliance laws were passed in 1986.

[7]The selection of management representatives, however, is somewhat problematic. Because GM has recently done a headcount reduction of management staff, they do not have a vast reservoir of human resources. The CAW has a wider base for selection. Consequently, much of the initiative and effort on the committees is coming from the union representatives. In addition, the Company fails to provide management reps with a block of time specifically for affirmative action. They must therefore integrate the latter with their regular work duties.

[8]In the skilled trades one can find the most striking example of this kind of culture. In all locations representatives report greatest opposition to affirmative action amongst skilled trades people.

[9]Eichler, Margrit, "Applying Equality to Employment." in Research Studies of the Commission on Equality in Employment (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1985), p.210.

[10]In 1984, affirmative action clauses were also negotiated with Ford and Chrysler, but these firms do not have active programmes in place.

[11]Eichler, p. 213

[12]Ontario Women's Directorate, "Employment Equity Award Winners 1987, "(1987), p.1.

[13]See for example, Sharon L. Harlan and Brigid O'Farrell, "After the Pioneers Prospects for Women in NonTraditional Blue-Collar Jobs." Work and Occupations 9, No. 3 (August 1982), p.377.

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